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SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

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## Introduction

Chairman Stefanik, Congressman Langevin, and other distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today in my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (SOLIC). I am pleased to share this table with General Tony Thomas, who has served the special operations force (SOF) community at all levels of command. Our entire SOLIC team is proud to partner with his command in forging the future of special operations on behalf of the Department of Defense and the American people.

We are grateful for this committee's strong support of special operations, as evidenced by the resources, authorities, and depth of understanding you provide in your oversight. We pledge to make the best use of these resources to accomplish all special operations mission sets – including defeating the threat networks of terrorists, illicit traffickers, and transnational criminals; denying the acquisition, proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction; and countering unconventional threats. At the same time, we appreciate your support in advancing SOF warrior care and force resiliency through the Preservation of the Force and Family - which places psychologists, counselors, and exercise physiologists into the daily routines of SOF to perform 'preventative maintenance,' catching and resolving problems before they become chronic - and SOF-for-Life initiatives.

As part of its roles and responsibilities, the OASD(SO/LIC) provides oversight and advocacy for the special operations budget, which is approximately 1.8% of our defense budget in 2017. Additionally, we directly manage over \$2 billion in various budgets that support our counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts, such as the Counterterrorism Fellowship Program, the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office, and the counternarcotics budget. We ensure that these investments are leveraged to provide return on investment across the strategic landscape, the interagency, and across the joint force.

I am here to report to you on the current and anticipated strategic environment that our Nation's special operations enterprise will face during this time of transformation. As global events shape our environment, our special operations mission continues finding, fixing, and finishing an innovative enemy while harnessing these trends and technologies for our own advantage. Let me begin by discussing that rapidly evolving environment and its effect on combating terrorists, state-sponsored unconventional warfare, and illicit networks that include, but are not limited to, transnational organized crime. I will then describe three SO/LIC focus areas that will allow us to: 1) win the current fight and defeat emerging threats, 2) build on the foundation of the Section 922 authorities, and 3) hone the edge of SOF personnel and capabilities.

### **Strategic Environment: The Megatrends of Individual Empowerment, Diffusion of Power, and Demographic Instability**

When John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt wrote their seminal work *Networks and Netwars* in 1991, they introduced the now-ubiquitous phrase: "it takes a network to defeat a network." Their work foresaw changes in the nature of warfare, which shaped how both we and our enemies encounter each other. Previously, Al-Qaeda leveraged the advantage of flat networks to strike

fielded forces and vulnerable targets around the world. In response, we built our own global network to harness these trends and seize the initiative.

Where Al-Qaeda leverages globalization and franchised network structures to threaten our interests, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) evolves its threat networks further, presenting new analytical and operational challenges by harnessing emerging megatrends. ISIS thrives in the volatile space carved out by these trends. This generation of VEOs adopts the latest technology to communicate on the battlefield and to influence new individuals and groups on behalf of the organization. They also use existing tools in novel ways – the non-state equivalent of the “gig economy” – and adapt so quickly that they overcome most governmental decision cycles. This generation of threats is challenging U.S. national security interests in ways we have not seen before. Social media allows ISIS to connect with individuals who share alienation and grievances, or agree with ISIS’ distortion of Islam. Digital innovation, both in warfighting and communications technologies, is a key to their success. Technologies such as mobile applications and the dark web help enable illicit trade on an exponentially increasing scale and have contributed to the growth in the number and power of illicit groups. As these groups leverage the darker side of these megatrends, SOF must adapt and innovate in order to disrupt threat networks and deter unconventional adversaries.

### **30 Years of USSOCOM and ASD (SO/LIC): SOF at the Intersection of Global Megatrends**

This year, we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both USSOCOM and ASD(SO/LIC). It is appropriate for us to reflect and build upon the past as we look to the future. For the latter half of the past 30 years, war has transformed our nation’s special operations community from a unique, specialized force that occupied a crucial niche in our security posture into a vanguard force that is reshaping our world. In combatting terrorists, special operations forces have built flat networks that bridge interagency divides down to the tactical level. Inherently joint, our special operations warfighters have continued to support global U.S. Government objectives by leveraging critical interagency and international partnerships. These boundary-spanning networks minimize our tactical response time while radically accelerating innovation. They also counter illicit threat networks, such as drug, weapons, and human trafficking, that fuel terrorist organizations and organized criminal enterprises. SOF support in Afghanistan for counter illicit drug trafficking has resulted in increased interdiction of opiates in various forms, reducing this funding resource for the Taliban and other insurgent and criminal groups.

Transregional threats like ISIS and transnational organized crime like drug cartels are demanding greater levels of coordination and collaboration from their – including operational planning, resource requirements, and information sharing. Effectively disrupting ISIS and other threat forces, requires all tools of U.S. national power, including diplomatic, intelligence, military, economic, financial, information, and law enforcement capabilities. The innovations the special operations enterprise has built to defeat adaptive threat networks are informing emerging concepts of unconventional and conventional warfare alike. In this way, SOF leads in Department-wide innovation, fielding, and optimizing emerging technologies and theories of warfighting.

### **Win the Current Fight and Defeat Emerging Threats**

We must win the protracted fight against terrorist organizations and their enabling networks in order to protect our homeland, our citizens, and support our allies and partners. This will require a long-term strategic approach to support the U.S. government and international partnerships. Within this DoD strategy, SOF contributes its unique capabilities to combat terrorists, disrupt adversary networks, discredit extremist ideologies, and diminish those factors that contribute to recruitment and radicalization. Sustained funding and flexible legislative authorities will continue to be instrumental in the defeat of priority terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

In light of U.S. conventional dominance, adversary powers are increasingly turning toward unconventional warfare to pursue their objectives. Countries demonstrating a willingness to use unconventional warfare, such as Russia, China, and Iran, have doctrinally linked conventional, warfare, and cyber warfare, information operations, clandestine, criminal, and other activities to undermine U.S. and allied national security objectives, particularly in ways and places that fall below thresholds conventional U.S. Government or international response. Our special operations forces are exploring the capabilities and authorities required to defeat these challenges to our influence and our interests.

At the same time, I want to thank the committee for establishing Section 127e – formerly known as Section 1208 – as a permanent authority. The maturation of this program has provided our warfighters a powerful tool to employ to support our allies and confront our enemies and is a great example of strong congressional support and oversight.

Congressional support for countering threat finance (CTF) and transnational organized crime is crucial to both of these efforts. Terrorist, insurgents, and other threat networks depend upon illicit revenue streams and criminal facilitators for logistical support, money laundering, or the procurement of weapons and fraudulent documents. These activities often involve both state and non-state actors in spaces between traditional war and peace. As the global synchronizer for DoD counter-threat finance, USSOCOM is uniquely positioned to synchronize efforts across the geographic combatant commands to disrupt the threat finance systems of ISIS, as well as other illicit networks. USSOCOM works alongside the National Guard Bureau and USG components in CTF teams in each GCC. Together, they provide essential support to military operations and to interagency law enforcement partners. The CTF teams analyze financial intelligence, integrate intelligence and operations, and coordinate and execute CTF activities. Countering threat finances disrupts and weakens terrorist and criminal adversaries in ways and places that traditional military weapons typically cannot reach. This capability is valuable across the full spectrum of conflict, including irregular and unconventional warfare. These efforts have enabled action against drug trafficking and other illicit networks, as emerging counter-network doctrine and technologies help unmask dark networks that threaten our national security. CTF efforts have proven to be a cost-effective tool to impact threatening forces and transnational criminal organizations, whether through law enforcement actions, designations, sanctions, or – as in the case of ISIS – through military actions against economic and financial targets.

The unique skills, culture, and capabilities underpinning SOF's success against these dark networks enable the command to serve as synchronizer against complex problem sets. As with CTF, this

expertise underwrites the recent transfer of the counter-WMD mission set, which USSOCOM recently inherited as a result of changes in the Unified Command Plan.

### **Transform the Enterprise: Building on the Foundations of Section 922 Authorities**

We appreciate the committee's support in codifying the responsibilities of the ASD(SO/LIC) to provide oversight and advocacy for SOF. As our force continues to adapt to meet the enduring challenge of global campaigns against global threats, we find ourselves at an institutional crossroads. SOF has made dramatic advances during wartime in response to urgent battlefield demands, gains that require an institutional foundation to endure. SOLIC has completed a preliminary analysis of previous and newly assigned functions and activities to determine where there are gaps and associated risk. Currently SOLIC is reviewing whether these functions are directed by law or directed by Department guidance in order to make recommendations to our senior leaders on the divestiture of non-legally binding responsibilities. In overseeing SOF acquisitions, technology, logistics, personnel, readiness, and talent management functions, SOLIC will be positioned to institutionalize these hard-learned lessons of contemporary conflicts. The 'Service-secretary-like' authorities in Section 922 serve as a strategic linchpin, ensuring that we lock in these hard-won gains.

The FY17 NDAA codified the Special Operations Policy Oversight Council, which we have used over the past year to resolve Department-wide SOF-related issues, such as base infrastructure. We are already serving in a 'Service-secretary-like' role in approving waivers for mission-essential positions under the current civilian hiring freeze. We now sit alongside our colleagues from USSOCOM at budgeting and programming Deputy Management Action Group meetings. Our office is currently implementing the full scope of these far-reaching authorities, even as we benchmark concepts from these initial gains. By leveraging existing Service processes and relationships, we aim to minimize administrative burden and focus on architecture building and strategic awareness. Ultimately, we intend to leverage these gains for implementation across the entire force.

### **Honing the Edge of SOF Personnel and Capabilities**

A key part of ASD(SO/LIC)'s role is to leverage our elite force to advance state of the art concepts, technologies, and strategies for both humans and hardware. For our operators, we strive to improve mental and physical performance on the battlefield and to take care of them and their families at home. For hardware, our investments in technologies and our policy advocacy for special operations capabilities give our SOF the tools they need to get the mission done.

The Countering Terrorism Technical Support Office (CTTSO) develops cutting edge technologies for SOF, the interagency, and law enforcement. For instance, we are exploring deep learning and big data analytics to sharpen strategies for outcompeting our adversaries. We are also investing in better technologies to analyze and present fused information to the warfighter. CTTSO's ability to leverage crowdsourcing pathways has helped field data tools that support operational preparation of the environment in ways we never thought possible. The versatility of these tools allows small tactical units to conduct a broad spectrum of military, special warfare, and cyber operations. Because the CTTSO model is inherently collaborative,

these gains are leveraged across the interagency, as well as with international, state, and local governmental partners.

The first SOF Truth states that “humans are more important than hardware.” Therefore, as we provide agile and innovative capabilities in support of high-priority U.S. national objectives, we must also continue to build and sustain an elite workforce suited to the unique and diverse demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. SOF has borne the weight of grueling deployments and protracted overseas contingency operations over the course of the last decade, and we have accordingly turned our culture of innovation toward fostering and protecting our people.

## **Conclusion**

As we look back at the last thirty years, we note that SOF has consistently remained at the leading edge of global megatrends. This past year has been no exception. We have diligently leveraged your investment by deriving key concepts for the larger force from that experience. The small portion of the budget that supports our nation’s SOF provides a tremendous return on investment. We are applying your support and oversight to institutionalize a decade and a half of hard-earned warfighting lessons and advances the goal of a joint SOF enterprise. With these authorities, we will continue to evolve how we man, train, and equip our force in order to: win the current fight and defeat emerging threats; transform the special operations enterprise; and hone the edge of SOF. We will continue to work closely with Congress to ensure we have the right policies, agile authorities, and enhanced oversight structure in place to employ SOF effectively.

I thank Congress for its continuing support of our men and women in uniform and their families, and look forward to your questions.